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BROWNBACK MAKES STATEMENT ON ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL FROM LEBANON

WASHINGTON – U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, issued the following statement on Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon. Text of his statement, delivered yesterday evening, follows.

"Earlier this week, the Senate passed Concurrent Resolution 116, commending Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon," Brownback said. "The resolution notes the original reason Israel was forced to occupy a narrow security strip in southern Lebanon – constant attacks on Israeli civilians from Lebanon-based terror groups. Israel had no designs on Lebanese territory; the Jerusalem government was forced to do the job that the central Lebanese authorities were unable or unwilling to perform.

"Lebanon is in a sad situation. It is a nation torn by sectarian strife, occupied by tens of thousands of Syrian troops, and overrun with terrorists. In the final analysis, however, the government of Lebanon must be called to account. For more than two decades, the international community has bemoaned Lebanon's fate without demanding responsible leadership. That era is now over.

"The fate of a number of Christians and Muslims in southern Lebanon hangs in the balance. They have been under the protection of Israel for more than two decades. What will happen to them? Will they be subject to the whims of yet another Lebanese militia, a Hezbollah state within a state? Will Christians be forced to flee, as they have from the West Bank and from so many other states? Or will the Lebanese central government and the Lebanese Army, as required under United Nations Security Council resolutions, take control of southern Lebanon and ensure safety and security for all?

"Will the Lebanese government allow the United Nations and UNIFIL to do its job and deploy throughout the South? Or will Lebanon remain a pawn in the hands of terrorists, a puppet state in the hands of Syria and Iran? This is the test. The president and the Congress have demanded that Lebanon secure its southern border and reintegrate southern Lebanese into the country. Hezbollah must be disarmed. The Syrian military must be evicted. The world is watching and the time is now.

"The citizens of northern Israel – indeed all Israelis – deserve to live within secure borders in peace. If they cannot, it is the solemn obligation of the Israeli government to secure those borders and to hunt down those who violate it. I intend to do all that I can to support Israel in that aim, and to ensure that the means and the political, diplomatic and material support are at hand for the Israeli government.

"This month could be a turning point for Lebanon, for Syria and for Israel. Or it could be the beginning of a new cycle of conflict. I pray that the Lebanese and the Syrians will seize the opportunity for real peace in the Middle East." Brownback said.